

Fear, Hostility, and Prejudice During Times of War and World Uncertainty

Overview

Understanding discrimination and what to do if you experience it.

- Understanding discrimination
- Understanding and coping with feelings of anger
- What to do if you experience discrimination
- Supporting one another
- Resources

A war in the Middle East or in any part of the world raises levels of fear and anxiety in us all. During times of crisis, our fears are heightened, we may feel a sense of helplessness, and there is the natural tendency to want to find something or someone to blame. We want quick answers and conclusions to painful and complex problems. But during times of world uncertainty it's more important than ever to remain clearheaded, in control of your feelings and actions, and not to rush to judgment.

Understanding discrimination

Discrimination -- or the unfavorable treatment of others based on prejudice -- occurs more frequently during times of war and world uncertainty. Discrimination raises our levels of fear. It can distract us from taking actions that ultimately lead to healing and resolution. It can also have serious legal consequences for those who participate in it. Here are steps you can take to confront discrimination:

- *Avoid attributing the acts of violence or terrorism of a few individuals to an entire race, religion, or group of people.*
- *Avoid listening to or spreading rumors.*
- *Learn more about people of other races, religions, and cultures* Many acts of discrimination or harassment are a result of a lack of understanding or knowledge of different cultures. Accurate information about people of other races, religions, political systems, and cultures will help you better understand today's changing world. Read articles from reputable newspapers and magazines and talk with knowledgeable people.
- *Try to see people as individuals and not just as members of a cultural, racial, or other group.* Avoid stereotypes, which are grossly exaggerated assumptions about a group. Stereotypes can cause mistrust and misunderstandings. Think about your own racial or ethnic background and about some of the negative and incorrect stereotypes others may have of your "group." Consider the many ways you are different from others who share the same racial, religious, or cultural group identity.
- *Examine your own attitudes and feelings about people from other cultures, races, and religions*
 - Do you react to people of different religions, cultures, and backgrounds with openness, respect, and an interest in learning about them?

- Do you teach tolerance and acceptance of difference to your children?

Understanding and coping with feelings of anger

Many people respond to acts of war or terrorism with anger and other strong feelings. They may feel anger toward individuals or groups they believe to be responsible for the violence. Feelings of anger are normal. What's important is to cope with your anger in a healthy way. Remember that

- *It is never OK to behave with anger or resentment against an individual or group.* You may need to talk about your feelings with a trusted friend, family member, or counselor. Expressing your anger toward others verbally or physically is never OK.
- *It is never OK to vent your anger toward an individual or a group by mail, over the telephone, or on the Internet.* Hate crimes, including those committed in Internet chat rooms or on Web sites, are illegal.
- *If you are having trouble managing your anger, seek help.* Your human resources (HR) department, employee assistance program (EAP), or employee resource program can provide you with resources and support. If you are not sure how to contact the EAP or employee resource program, find out how to do so from your manager or HR department.
- *Channel your anger into efforts to help others.* Write letters, make donations, or otherwise become involved with relief efforts. Anger may be caused by feelings of helplessness and frustration. Finding things in your life that you do have control over can be very helpful. One way to take control is to help others.
- *If you are a parent, remember that your child is learning powerful lessons from you about how to react in times of war and world uncertainty.* A lesson you want to teach your children is the distinction between feeling angry and acting on your anger. Acting on your anger is not a lesson you want to teach. Instead, help your child understand that it's normal to feel angry and to want to find someone to blame, but focusing efforts on helping others is more important.

What to do if you experience discrimination

If you, a family member, or someone you know experiences discrimination or harassment, seek support. Harassment can include spoken comments, written comments, or behavior that is meant to annoy, disturb, or frighten another person. Acts of hostility and discrimination can threaten your feelings of safety and make you feel vulnerable and alone.

- *If you receive hate mail, hate phone calls, or threats outside of work, file a report with the police immediately.* Ask that the incident be treated as a hate crime. A hate crime is a violent act against a person, persons, property, or organization because of the group the person identifies with or belongs to. Hate mail and threats can be very

frightening and may cause you to want to avoid going to work or other public places. Seek support from family, friends, and your EAP.

- *Document the incident.* Write down exactly what was said and/or done by the offender. Save evidence -- for example, by taking photographs.
- *Follow up with investigators.*
- *If you are ever worried about your safety or your family's safety, contact the police.*
- *If you receive threatening or offensive phone calls, messages, or e-mail at work, report the harassment immediately to your manager or your HR department.* If you are not sure how to approach your manager or HR department, the EAP can help you find support from your company.
- *Inform trusted neighbors, family members, and friends about the crime.* Neighbors may be willing to keep an eye out for strangers in the area, or unusual events. Friends may be able to provide support in other ways.
- *Seek support from community organizations.* Contact local support groups, organizations, or your faith community for support.
- *If you are concerned that your child may be the victim of discrimination, talk with school authorities about your concerns.* Ask for support from your child's teacher, administrators, and the school psychologist. It is important to make teachers and school officials aware of your concerns. Offer to speak with teachers or children to help them learn more about your culture. Urge school officials to look for opportunities to deepen understanding among faculty and students of diverse cultural attitudes and behaviors, and racial and gender stereotyping.
- *Talk with your child and allow him to express any fears or concerns he might have.* Let your child know that discrimination is wrong. Consider talking with a therapist or counselor if your child is having behavioral problems or trouble coping.

Supporting one another

- *Intervene when public discussions or individual actions target a person or minority group.* Educate and try to reason with people who are stereotyping or blaming people unfairly. Ask people to recognize the pressures and tension that are present because of world uncertainty, terrorism, and war.
- *Be kind to others.* Find channels for acts of charity or helping.
- *Be sensitive to the needs and issues of people who may be directly affected by the war effort.* Make a special effort to express interest and offer support.

Resources

The American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
4201 Connecticut Ave, N.W; Suite 300
Washington, DC 20008
202-244-2990
www.adc.org

This national, bi-partisan organization fights defamation and discrimination against Arab Americans. Hate crimes and discrimination can be reported through the ADC. The Web site includes information for Arab American parents on talking with children about the war in Iraq.

The Anti-Defamation League
www.adl.org.

The ADL is a national organization with regional offices that combat bigotry, prejudice, and discrimination through education; political, legal, and social action; and an active media campaign. The Web site has articles and information about many ADL activities, including tracking hate crimes, activism on college campuses, civil rights, and hate on the Internet.

The Council on American Islamic Relations
453 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20003
202-488-8787
www.cair-net.org

CAIR's goal is to promote a positive image of Islam and Muslims in the U.S. through education and political and social action. The national organization has publications, conferences and seminars, as well as a legal department that handles discrimination cases.

Tolerance.Org
www.tolerance.org

This Web site promotes tolerance and diversity and combats hate discrimination through education, investigation, and litigation. The site has information and articles about different minority groups, talking with children about intolerance during war, and activities for schools and families interested in learning about tolerance.